

Spearmint Rhino defeated by Unfunded NGO



After spending more than a year pursuing the tiny, unfunded pressure group, [Not Buying It](#) through the courts, Spearmint Rhino has now 'rescinded' its claim. It is to pay substantial costs to Not Buying It's legal team following a court order for costs to be paid back in September 2019 and their discontinuance of the court proceedings.

Spearmint Rhino as a company, and nine of its lap dancers, commenced legal action last year against Not Buying It and its CEO, Dr Sasha Rakoff, for exposing the sexual contact rife at its strip clubs. After more than a year of legal battle, which Spearmint Rhino heavily publicised at the time, it has discontinued the claim and agreed to pay Not Buying It and Dr Rakoff's legal costs. It has also released the pressure group and its CEO from prohibitions (entered into voluntarily by both Not Buying It and its CEO) on disclosure of the information they had obtained and cannot bring any further claims on this issue.

This is being heralded as a major victory for Not Buying It in a legal case of David and Goliath proportions.

"We are hugely grateful to our legal team for all their work on this, Saunders Law and barrister, Beth Grossman and their successful, expert defence of our campaigning" says Not Buying It CEO, Dr Sasha Rakoff.

Matthew Purcell, partner at Saunders Law said: **"This was a disappointing case of a large and well-resourced company, attempting to quash the work of our client in a misguided and self-serving claim. The team's aim, at all times, was to defend our clients' rights, whilst ensuring that no harm is caused to the individual performers, who Spearmint Rhino may have considered were simply pawns."**

Beth Grossman, counsel of Doughty Street Chambers said: **“Dr Rakoff and Not Buying It exercised their rights to free speech responsibly. Campaigning groups are hugely vulnerable to corporate entities because the law in this area is complex, the system difficult to understand and the costs of legal action significant. It’s been a pleasure to work with Saunders Law, Sasha and Not Buying It to achieve such a well-deserved outcome”**

The legal challenge by the club was ‘fronted’ by 9 of its lap dancers (half of whom, it was later revealed, the strip chain had fired) with most prior media coverage not mentioning Rhino’s involvement at all, even though two Spearmint Rhino companies were claimants in the action.

Ostensibly, Spearmint Rhino and its lap dancers had taken Not Buying It and it’s CEO to court because of video evidence the pressure group had had to gather as proof of breaches and exploitation at the chain. It was asserted that it was a breach of privacy for gathering such evidence (even though lap dancers are filmed at their place of work by club CCTV all the time) and that the pressure group would distribute such footage - some even declaring this ‘an act of revenge porn’.

“We made it clear long before they thought of taking us to court that we are about exposing the industry, *not* the dancers. We also made it clear that we were taking proper steps to protect the women’s privacy. We have never, and will never, identify them and we certainly were never going to distribute any video footage! What Rhino was *really* trying to quash was the serious breaches and exploitation at their clubs – typical of how the entire strip industry operates” says Dr Rakoff.

Not Buying It believes this is yet more evidence of how the strip industry uses and ‘hides behind’ its lap dancers for its own ends.

“By discontinuing the claim Spearmint Rhino has now basically told us ‘do what you like with the videos’. It clearly shows the real motivation for this case – threatening anyone who dares whistle blow on the strip trade with hugely stressful and potentially ruinous legal proceedings.”

It also shows the huge conflict of interests at play.

“This is a strip chain that has previously gone to court to stop lap dancers from having employment rights. It had fired half the women it then used to take this case against us. It has a documented 20 year history of exploitation (including prostitution, harassment and assault of its lap dancers). Yet we are supposed to now believe that it cares so very much about its lap dancers that it took this legal action, at a cost to itself of £10,000s if not £100,000s, ‘on their behalf’? No. There was only ever one interest being served here and that was Spearmint Rhino’s” says Rakoff.

Not Buying It feels it is clear that the real purpose of this legal action was to intimidate anyone from speaking out against the strip industry. The fact that the club didn’t just come after Not Buying It but its unpaid CEO as well - putting her personally at risk of potentially £100,000s in legal costs - speaks for itself.

“If it’s doing this to me, what do you think the industry does to its lap dancers to make sure they back down and shut up? We already work closely with survivors of the strip trade. We would be more than happy to work with women still in it to hold the industry, and the councils who license it, to account”.

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Contact

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Notes

1. [Saunders Law](#)
2. [Beth Grossman](#)
3. More on prior stages in the legal proceedings, where a judge ruled against Spearmint Rhino and highlighted a litany of failure by its legal team [here](#)
4. Abuse at Spearmint Rhino across the chain and across continents is documented here: <https://notbuyingit.org.uk/strip-publications/#Rhino>